CHAPTER XII

"THE GBEATEST OP THESE is CHARITY

IT is natural, in a work which deals with the Jewish contribution to civilisation, to devote a section to beneficent activities ; for, if there was any quality which the Jew was able to maintain and to enhance even during the age of persecution, it was the spirit of charity.

Research upon this subject is still necessary in order to bring out to the full the distinctive quality of this Jewish contribution. For it had certain specific characteristics which were all its own. The degree of destitution among the Jews was enormous, at the time when Ghetto deprivation was at its height ; it is computed, for example, that in the eighteenth century one in three of the Jewish population in Germany, England and Italy, was dependent upon his co-religionists for relief, and as many more were living upon the border-line of penury. Yet the cry for assistance was never made in vain; and relief was given in such a manner as to facilitate the maximum of self-reliance, and to avoid pauperisation.

It is significant that the most bulky work on charity ever published (with the exception of Lallemand's four-volume *Histoire de la Charity* is the *Meil ZedaJca* by an eighteenth-century Jewish author of Smyrna, Elijah Cohen.

Some of the outstanding characteristics of post-Biblical
[an(]i mediaeval Jewish philanthropy deserve cursory
mention. It was realised from the beginning that the